

PHL 385-Issues in Aesthetics

Instructor: Dr. Dustin Stokes
Section: LO102; Winter Term
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Course description

This will be a course in analytic philosophy of art. We will divide our time (roughly) across two sets of issues: 1) What is our concept of art and how does that concept function in our theories and appreciation of art? 2) What is the nature of our cognitive responses to art?

Can we provide an essential definition—independently necessary and conjointly sufficient conditions—for ‘art’? We begin with this question by looking at some classical attempts to define art: art as mimesis, as representation, as expression. We then quickly turn to more contemporary attempts to define ‘art’, namely, institutional and historical theories. We will also consider some “non-definitional” characterizations in the spirit of Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language. Even if at the end of these analyses we find that art cannot be defined, the mere attempt is illuminating: the features of art which make it difficult to define are the very features that distinguish art as an invaluable part of our lives. Finally, we will ask about the theoretical role of a concept of art and the evaluative role of categories of art.

The second focus of the course is on cognitive engagements with art, thus emphasizing research at the intersection of philosophy of art and philosophy of mind. First, how do we cognitively evaluate artworks and how does this value contribute to the artistic value of artworks? We then turn to two distinct but related issues: the role of imagination in our experience of art and our emotional responses to art. One way to think about representational artworks is in terms of the ways such works encourage us to use our imagination. This invites a number of interesting questions: How does imagination interact with other mental states and with action? How much control do we have over our imaginings? Can we imagine anything we choose? We also respond emotionally to fictional events and characters. But why? We know (while watching or reading them) that fictions are merely fictional, so why or how do we respond in such rich emotional ways? We’ll consider philosophical answers to this and other related problems of fiction.

Text

All readings are available electronically: either via UT libraries online (via JSTOR, etc.) or via the course blackboard website. See attached ‘Course Readings’ list for full bibliographical details.

Assignments/Requirements:

10% Attendance/discussion/participation	
25% Short paper 1	DUE 11 FEB (questions distributed 2 Feb)
25% Short paper 2	DUE 18 MAR (questions distributed 11 Mar)
40% Final exam	

The short papers might also be thought of as take-home exams. You will be given a short list of questions, from which you will choose and respond to one. The questions will be distributed in class, and the papers are to be submitted the following week at the start of class. Your responses should be concise and to the point, and should be approximately 750-1250 words.

The final exam will be comprehensive and essay-style, but like the short papers, you will have choices between questions.

The participation component is mostly composed of participation in discussion group sessions, held in class. Unless the instructor announces otherwise, the discussion sessions will take place on: **21 Jan.; 11 Feb.; 4 Mar., 1 Apr.**

General:

This is a writing intensive course. All of the work/examinations will be written. Your papers will be graded not only on content, but also on grammar, writing mechanics, style, etc.

All paper/exam dates are listed on this syllabus. Therefore, late work/exams are allowed only if arranged at least one week prior to the scheduled due date/exam date. Unexcused late work will be penalized accordingly.

If you require special test-taking or note-taking accommodations, please see me.

(Tentative) Reading/discussion schedule:

DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS OF ART

- 7 Jan.** *Introduction/fundamentals/history*
- 14 Jan.** *Definitions and context*
 A. Danto, 'The Artworld' (@)
- 21 Jan.** *Context and history*
 J. Levinson, 'Defining Art Historically' (@)
 G. Currie, 'Aliens, Too' (@)
 Group discussion
- 28 Jan.** *Against definitions/alternatives*
 N. Carroll, intro. from *Theories of Art Today*, 3-15 (b)
 B. Gaut, 'Art' as a Cluster Concept' (b)
- 4 Feb.** *Concepts and culture*
 D. Lopes, 'Art without 'art'' (b)
- 11 Feb.** *Categories of art*
 K. Walton, 'Categories of Art' (@)
 Group discussion
- 18 Feb.** NO CLASS-READING WEEK

ART AND MIND

- 25 Feb. *Art and cognitive value*
Stokes, 'Art and modal knowledge' (b)
Stock, 'Fiction and Psychological Insight' (b)
- 4 Mar. *Imagination and emotion*
Walton, from *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (b)
- 11 Mar. Currie, 'The Paradox of Caring' (b)
Gaut, 'Reasons, Emotions, and Fictions' (b)
- 18 Mar. Shelley, 'Imagining the Truth: An Account of Tragic Pleasure' (b)
Gendler, 'The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance' (@)
- 25 Mar. Stokes, 'The Evaluative Character of Imaginative Resistance' (@)
- 1 Apr. *Perception and the arts*
Danto, 'Seeing and Showing' (@)
Rollins, 'The invisible content of visual art' (@)

(b) papers available on course blackboard site
(@) papers available online via UT ejournals

Resources:

All of the readings will be primary sources. Needless to say, much of this material will be challenging. You might find some of the following resources helpful.

-For a good introductory book on philosophy of art and aesthetics, I suggest Noel Carroll's *Philosophy of Art* (Routledge 1999).

-For resource-style texts on aesthetics, see the *Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, 2nd Ed., ed. Gaut, B. and Lopes, D. (Routledge 2005) or the *Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Levinson, J. (Oxford University Press 2003)

-For general philosophy resources, I suggest both *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, (1999) ed. Audi, R. and *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, (1994) ed. Blackburn, S. Online, try the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <http://plato.stanford.edu/>